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# The Wolf Stalker

A Tale of the Old New England Frontier.

By G. WALDO BROWNE.

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## CHAPTER VI. THE PHANTOM CANOE.

The Indian seemed to be going toward the shore, and the forest which was formed by an elbow in the shore, without dreaming of the wolfish figure rapidly overtaking him. The Forester, placing two fingers against his lips, sent forth a low, peculiar call, which sound, if subdued, was clear enough to travel a long distance. It seemed to have no effect on the Indian, but his weird pursuer abruptly changed its course, and a moment later disappeared into the dense growth reaching down to the narrow rim of sandy beach. A moment after Plausawa also disappeared, several yards in advance of his enemy.

"I'll tell the Chief on his watch," remarked Gray Cliff, in a low tone of evident satisfaction. "It but paid an old debt."

"If you meant that whistle for the Injun, Forester," said Tom Bradley, "he did not notice it, for he kept on just as if he had not heard it."

"His way of reading the sign, lad, Plausawa knows how the stick floats. It was a good trait that he did not notice it, but that, or it'd shown the trail to his enemy."

"The wolf stalker seemed to be hit by it," said John Stark, "for it fairly took him off his feet."

"I missed it, I did. I must own that sign puzzles me. No true wolf would have been thrown off his tracks thus. Mark how you canoe has moved since last we saw it?"

"It was just noticing it," replied John Stark. "It seems to be making for that point of rock. Shall we follow it?"

"I'm minded too, I swan I am. It may show a lack of discretion, but only the unwary are trapped. Maybe we'll give it a bit of a chase."

"Let me take the paddle, Forester," said William Stark. "My arms are getting cramped doing nothing."

"As you say, lad," replied the Forester, taking a position at the stern, where he could shape their course to suit his own inclination. John Stark now sat in the prow of the light craft, and understanding the uncommon peril of their hazardous adventure, he held his gun so he could throw its stock to his shoulder at a moment's warning, while he kept a close watch over the scene ahead. The Forester nodded, as if pleased by the ready caution of his young companion.

Then began a race under such conditions as impressed the younger members of the party with a feeling not likely to be soon forgotten. If the solitary canoe, that seemed to be driven on without human power, could be considered a phantom craft, their own advance was scarcely less weird and remarkable. Under the skillful hand of William Stark the paddles rose and fell in silence, cutting the silvery water like two-edged swords, the only sound being the rhythmic stilling of the gentle murmur of the ripples furrowed by the sharp prow of the birchen skiff. The stars lent a bewitching glimmer rather than a light to the scene, half revealing what they attempted to illuminate.

"The canoe is passing the point of the ledge, which looks like a stone wedge driven into the water," said the young lad.

The shore opposite to them presented an irregular wall of rock, rising at places to a height of more than a dozen feet, everywhere honeycombed with the action of the water and the action of the waves and fissures had been formed in the granite floor. Seen under the shadows of the overhanging forest and by the glimmer of the stars, it required no great strain of the imagination to picture grotesque shapes in the act of stepping forth from their caverns of stone. But the eyes of the little party in the canoe gave small heed to this scene, as they continued to watch the trail bark now rounding the rocky promontory.

"Your speech shows that you're a clear eye," said Gray Cliff, who was noting carefully the motions of the phantom canoe. "Now that I come to see more closely its shape and shadowy presentment, I mark what has escaped my notice, as great an indiscretion as it were. It's curious how forgetful one grows with the years, and the more there is for us to remember the more we forget. I swan we do. This is the very hour and the water trail of Noka, the Deer of the Coos, whom the dusky sons of the forest plies his birchen skiff along this trackless trail to keep his tryst with the Penacook Princess who is waiting for him just yon that point of rock. It's clear to me now, lad, and I never see it as cunning of the red man's hand in it all."

"Look close, lads, and mark if ever you see a canoe befall o' paddle move as steady and swift as that yon; or a skiff bearing no burden that set so low in the water. Mind you, I say this in the simple truth of that faith which is as old as humanity that you silent moving canoe is the maskwa (birch bark) of Noka, the red man of the forest, the fair lakelet when it was young."

"I have heard of a white canoe crossing this pond at a certain time, and which is supposed to carry the spirit of an Indian warrior on his way to meet his loved one waiting for him somewhere along this shore," said John Stark. "I have heard it also said that no one has been able to tell where the canoe comes or whither it goes."

"I have heard that the Indian maid was turned into stone, and in that form she is still waiting for him," declared Tom, who trembled as he repeated the portion of the scanty stock of information. "Tell us more of the white canoe, Forester."

"If I do, lad, it will be as the red man tells it, and not as one versed in the teachings of books. When nature speaks to me in the voice of the waterfall, or in the song of the waterfowl, I've no argument to offer. It is so when the sons of Nature repeat to me their fanciful tales. If a man of keen instinct and deep insight into the problems that most interest mankind, living the solitary life he did, at ways in communion with the inanimate objects around him, it was natural the mind of the Forester should be so fully touched with that human element which is so common to all. Given years of solitude and the greatest scholar and thinker of today would eventually become imbued with this controlling spirit."

woodsman, a peer among men in woodcraft, may not have believed a word of the legend he was about to repeat, but he felt it in his heart. Well might this be so, for though 150 years have passed since it was last told by an Indian, the pale-face narrator who has been

come his successor still finds interested listeners.

"While I stumble through the tale, lads, I will not be careless of my duty, nor shall my old eyes lose their watchfulness. I need not remind you, sons of Stark, to act with discretion. If you cannot be what my tale will try to make it, then it will only be a discretionary pursuer who overtakes it. Besides, it's always the unwary that wears the fool's cap in the face of danger."

Then, while John Stark maintained his

CHAPTER VII.  
THE FRIENDLY CHIEF.

As the figure of the Indian on the shore of the pond stood out more conspicuously upon nearer approach, the younger members of the canoe, but the Forester himself, were disappointed in not recognizing the friendly Plausawa, who had given

into the canoe, which slipped away from the shore, and, as if driven by a spirit power, kept on across the pond. It followed in the same course of this canoe to-night, passed the point of rocks on our left, and sped to the very feet of Eneawa waiting for her lover on the shore. When the reds found he was still standing there in that expectant attitude, as she stands to-night, a pillar of stone."

"There is the stone Princess!" exclaimed Tom Bradley, pointing to a stone image faintly outlined at the edge of the water. "But where is the canoe?"

"Is not that the Indian standing on the rock just beyond the stone Princess, Forester?" asked John Stark, who had paid no heed to the remarks of his young companion.

"It was marking him myself, lad. Nay, make no wondrous move, for see! he is signaling to us."

Waiting patiently until their greetings were over, the Forester then asked:

"What sign have you sent?"

"Philip's nostrils sent the air of battle. The Ameriscoguns are on the war-trail; already they have lifted the hatchet; and already the white man has felt the blow. Captives are even lying on their ropes, warriors are on the door-mats of peaceful homes."

"Aweel, nows me, Chief, I read this sign, I swan I did. Have you more to unravel from this canoe?"

"Let Taconica and his young friends look on this," answered the Chief, taking from under a fold in his hunting shirt a pipe bowl, roughly carved from clay with a knife. "This pipe bowl," he continued, "is a cross engraved on one side, while the other bore the letter 'W'."

"Some St. Francis red, made to believe in the Catholic Church," he said, "as if the pipe bowl could be a point of a white man without a cross. It was made not many moons since. Where did you pick it up, Chief?"

"On the banks of the river an hour's walk below here," replied the Sokokis, calmly.

"So the painted pagans are 'twen us and the settlements as well as 'bove us," suggested William Stark, "and these are they are moving toward the settlements below?"

"As the river runs downward," replied the Chief, "I opined as much. There be need of fleet runners to cut these ropes, that the guns may be primed and the stars shot across the same track within as many minutes, and I read in the trail of the Indians, that they were running tilt with each other, for where so many meet the skein must be tangled."

Philip nodded, saying:

"St. Francis Indians had Indians; pale-faces had pale-faces; and the Sokokis, before the Forester could comment upon this self-evident fact, the little group was surprised, if not startled, by a shrill, childish cry ringing out distinctly on the evening air. It was the voice of a child, by surprise, Tom Bradley uttered an involuntary exclamation, and trembled from head to foot. More used to life in the wilderness, and having followed more than one trail to the Sokokis, he had never shown scarcely more excitement than the Forester, while the Sokokis showed no manifestation of feeling. The sound did not exhaust itself at once, as a quick, shrill cry usually does, but continued with rising and lowering inflections, while the five listened in silence.

"It is some child—perhaps a captive in the hands of the Indians," said John Stark, in a low tone.

"The lad shows a clear eye," declared the Forester. "Be it captive or not, it is some dire amazement."

"Perhaps they are killing it!" exclaimed Tom, who was all a-tremble. "Let's get away from this terrible place."

"The cry speaks more of fright than suffering," declared Taconica. "It comes from round the point of ledge yon."

"Philip soon said, 'I'll go and see, and without waiting for a reply started across the neck of land, quickly disappearing into the depth of the forest."

"Let's move around the point in the canoe," suggested William Stark. "Not a bad idea," assented the Forester, and a moment later all were again in the canoe. William took up the paddle, and the slight boat rapidly advanced, while the companions held their breath whatever they might discover. Directly the rocky point upon which stood the stone maid was rounded, when they came another little cove cutting into the rocky shore. As his keen vision swept the contracted scene, the Forester whispered:

"The cry comes from the white canoe."

"I do not see any canoe," said Tom. "It has run in under the arm of a water-bush just below that big rock," replied John Stark, who was scrutinizing the shore as closely as even the Forester. "It is a child, and I do not believe there are any Indians round, unless it is but there as a decoy. Do you think that is what it is, Taconica?"

"The Chief will soon read the sign," replied the Forester, maintaining a close vigil over the scene, which he held "Old Danger" ready for action. The cries of the child were increasing in volume, speaking of great fright or suffering on the part of the little one, which could not yet be seen by our party.

"If there be no reds about now they'll be drawn here as the sun draws flies," remarked the Forester. "Nows me, the Chief's clus by."

Though his companions had not discovered the shadowy figure gliding through the growth, a moment later the dusky form of Philip appeared at the edge of the water, and a low whistle rang clearly on the air.

"The trail be clear," declared Taconica. "You may run the birch down to the bowlder, William."

The latter had not wholly stopped paddling, and with these encouraging words he gave greater impetus to his work, and a minute later he sent the canoe close down to the spot where Philip was bending over the strange canoe. The Forester quickly stepped from the canoe and approached the side of the Chief. He was followed closely by John Stark, but before the latter reached the spot the woodsman had lifted something from the bottom of the strange canoe, which he held gently in his folded arms. Its outlines, becoming more subdued now, if nothing else, told that it was a child.

"Here is a string of knots to be untied," remarked the Forester, while he gazed into the little, tear-stained countenance upturned with wonder at his sun-bronzed, bearded visage. Singularly enough, the poor, frightened child lay quite still now, as it cuddled, softly, confidently, in his clasp. The others looked on in silent wonder at the infant found in this unexpected manner.

"It is a little girl, is it not?" asked William Stark. "She cannot be much more than a year old. Who can she be?" "It's 'yon my ken, lad; 'yon my ken," replied the Forester. "This be an amazement to unravel. Chief, what do you make of this?"

"Some mother in great hurry put her here; see, grass for head to lay on. Rocks

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"Your sign is read like an open hand, Chief," replied the Forester, as he finally loosened his clasp of the other's palm, and took a step backward, so the Chief might see clearly those who were with him. "These lads with me are true sons of the trail, whom you can trust as I trust you. Come from the settlements lower down the river of Swift Waters."

Then Philip, the last of the Sokokis, clasped with becoming dignity the hand of Chief of the younger members of this party, and from this meeting sprang a friendship between him and the Stark brothers which was to be cemented in blood during the perils and hardships of the "Seven Year War," when their three "sons" known as the bravest of "Rogers' Rangers."

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"On the banks of the river an hour's walk below here," replied the Sokokis, calmly.

"So the painted pagans are 'twen us and the settlements as well as 'bove us," suggested William Stark, "and these are they are moving toward the settlements below?"

"As the river runs downward," replied the Chief, "I opined as much. There be need of fleet runners to cut these ropes, that the guns may be primed and the stars shot across the same track within as many minutes, and I read in the trail of the Indians, that they were running tilt with each other, for where so many meet the skein must be tangled."

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